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SUBJECT: DARFUR PEACE TALKS UPDATE: OBASANJO MEETS WITH REBEL MOVEMENTS

11. (SBU) Summary: President Olusegun Obasanjo met with the leaders of the Darfur rebel movements on June 30 and urged them to be flexible over the remaining points of contention on the Declaration of Principles. He also encouraged them to continue the negotiations, and above all, be patient. A well-briefed Obasanjo pointed out to the movements that the international community and the people of Darfur are waiting for a positive outcome as a sign of good faith. Rebel leaders were pleased that Obasanjo took the time to meet with them. We will judge how far the goodwill goes later on July 1 when the parties are presented with compromise language on some of the outstanding issues. End Summary.

12. (SBU) President Olusegun Obasanjo met with a small group of leaders from the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) and Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) on June

130. The meeting included Abduljabar Dosa, the leader of SLM's delegation, and four other members of SLM's negotiating team and Dr. Khalil Ibrahim, Ahmed Togud, and several other JEM members. The meeting lasted only twenty minutes, but Obasanjo was well-versed on the key sticking points of the DOP, according to Togud, and stated that the main issues of disagreement could be overcome. Obasanjo's overall argument was that the parties need to be patient. He encouraged them to continue their discussions because many of the obstacles now in the way can be negotiated in future sessions when the core political, economic, and social issues will be discussed. Obasanjo did not meet with the Government of Sudan.

13. (SBU) Obasanjo told the movements that Nigerians are very familiar with the issues at stake, such as unity and religious freedom. Obasanjo stated that the current language providing for "non-discrimination based on religion" is sufficient and provides enough protection to move the DOP forward. Obasanjo said that this issue needs to be tackled at length in the political discussions, not in the DOP. According to Obasanjo, Nigeria was able to work out issues of religious freedom, while protecting the rights of non-Muslims, and recognizing the secular nature of governmental affairs.

14. (SBU) Obasanjo met with the movements at the request of Dr. Salim Salim, who briefed the President prior to the meeting. For its part, Togud said that JEM was pleased that Obasanjo took the time to meet with them. SLM described the meeting with President Obasanjo as coming at a good time, according to Abduljabar Dosa, SLM's head of delegation, and Bahar Arabie. Bahar felt confident that the newly-appointed technical committee is empowered enough to work through some of the DOP's final sticking points. (Comment: All of the SLM members in Abuja met on June 29 and reportedly came to agreement on a few issues, such as delegation representation and the assignment of the DOP's contentious issues to individual SLM members. Deeper leadership issues remain. End Comment.)

15. (SBU) Comment: Obasanjo's words of encouragement were welcome development. The rebel movements' flexibility will be tested on July 1, when another version of the DOP's with compromise language on the remaining issues of unity, religion, land rights, and impunity.

CAMPBELL